

**Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**West Lake Junior High School  
3400 South 3450 West  
West Valley City, Utah 84119**

**April 19-20, 2005**



Utah State Office of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**West Lake Junior High School**

**3400 South 3450 West  
West Valley City, Utah 84119**

**April 19-20, 2005**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

**Patti Harrington, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF  
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

**Christine Kearl, Associate Superintendent**

**Brett Moulding, Director  
Curriculum and Instruction**

**Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist  
Curriculum and Instruction**

**Salt Lake City, Utah**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	ii
Utah State Board of Education .....	iii
Granite School District Board of Education and District Administration .....	1
West Lake Junior High School Administration and Staff .....	3
West Lake Junior High School Mission Statement and Belief Statements .....	5
Members of the Visiting Team .....	6
Visiting Team Report.....	7
Chapter 1: School Profile.....	7
Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry.....	8
Chapter 2: The Self-Study Process .....	8
Chapter 3: Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness .....	9
Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals .....	9
Curriculum Development.....	11
Quality Instructional Design .....	12
Quality Assessment Systems .....	13
Leadership for School Improvement .....	15
Community Building .....	16
Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning.....	17
Chapter 4: Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) Standards I-XI .....	17
Chapter 5: School Improvement Efforts – Action Plan .....	18
Chapter 6: Major Commendations and Recommendations of the Visiting Team .....	19

## **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 19-20, 2005, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of West Lake Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Art Cox is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at West Lake Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at West Lake Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

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250 East 500 South  
P. O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200

**District 1**

Teresa L. Theurer  
66 Canterbury Circle  
Logan, UT 84321  
Phone: (435) 753-0740

**District 6**

Tim Beagley  
3974 South 3550 West  
West Valley City, UT 84119  
Phone: (801) 969-6454

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Bill Colbert  
14862 S Coalville Way  
Draper, UT 84020  
Phone: (801) 572-1608

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5841 West 4600 South  
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Phone: (801) 272-3516

**District 13**

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Phone: (801) 607-4702

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875 Edgewood Dr.  
Ogden, UT 84403  
Phone: (801) 479-7988

**District 9**

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1101 Framewood Ln  
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Phone: (801) 281-8746

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Dixie Allen  
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Vernal, UT 84078  
Phone: (435) 789-0534

**District 5**

Kim R. Burningham  
932 Canyon Crest Drive  
Bountiful, UT 84010  
Phone: (801) 292-9261

**District 10**

Laurel Brown  
5311 So. Lucky Clover Ln  
Murray, UT 84123  
Phone: (801) 261-4221

**District 15**

Debra G. Roberts  
Box 1780  
Beaver, UT 84713  
Phone: (435) 438-5843

**Bonnie Jean Beesley\***

1492 East Kristianna Cir.  
Salt Lake City, UT 84103  
Phone: (801) 359-0295

**Sara V. Sinclair\***

1340 North 1500 East  
Logan, UT 84341-2851  
Phone: (435) 754-0216

**Patti Harrington**

Executive Officer

**Twila B. Affleck**

Secretary

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Dale Roberts.....	Director, Information Systems
Gary Hansen.....	Director, Purchasing, Printing & Warehouse

# WEST LAKE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

### School Administration

Art Cox..... Principal  
Michele Callahan ..... Assistant Principal  
Ken Devries ..... Intern Assistant Principal

### Counseling

Stephen Chard..... Counselor  
Carol Goulais ..... Counselor  
Larry Jensen..... Counselor  
Robin Raine ..... Counselor  
Scott Bell..... Intern Counselor

### Support Staff

Shirley Alfred  
Hillary Allen  
Regina Anderson  
Karla Bergevin  
Justin Boardman  
Harvey Bragg  
Julie Cazier  
Karen Cone-Uemura  
Robert (Andy) Cowan  
Alice Crowther  
Kent Dickinson  
Carole M. Ekblad  
Lynette Evans  
Nellie Gadd  
Jean Hastings  
Janeen Holter  
Lucy Hurst  
James Delano  
Lindsay Jenkel

Susan Jones  
Oleta Kingery  
Angela Knight  
Debbie Korous  
Faye Kyle  
Glenda Laufer  
Leisl Leystra  
Emily Lockhart  
Beverly Lujan  
Fuatai (Tai) Mactiag  
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Eloise McCullough  
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Geri Miles  
Shyrma L Nelson  
Dianna Neve  
Naomi Norwood  
Lama Pasia  
Connie Perkins

Jelena Platts  
Molly Remund  
Kalli Saibara-Cook  
Lucia Saucedo  
Bonnie Smith  
Robynn Spencer  
Leah Stewart  
Alan Stott  
Susan Sumsion  
Gurpreet Kaur Tambhar  
Ladd Turner  
Monique Torres-Reymus  
Dee Unamuno  
Michael Valdes  
Patricia A. Wheeler  
LuRae H. Wilson  
Nina Wood



## **Faculty**

Janae Anderson  
George Beardall  
Deborah Billingsley  
Richard Brecht  
Angela Brickey  
Scott Bringhurst  
Kent Burton  
Alyssa Chadwick  
June Christiansen  
Malynda Cloward  
Kate Cotterall  
Lloyd Earl  
Diane Eaton  
Nancy Fidler  
Kathy Glover  
Jean Hagen  
Brad Hertz  
Bruce Hinckley  
Leslie James  
Ellen Mae Johnson

Janice Johnson  
Kristine Johnson  
Lisa Johnson  
Luise Johnston  
Nii Kinikini  
Steve Kjar  
Leila Law  
James Leslie  
Tom Lewis  
Rebecca Lucy  
Leonard Maddox  
Paul Masimer  
Doug Mather  
Onno Mattheus  
Marla Merrill  
Ruth Merrill  
Brenda Monson  
Shauna Morley  
Barbie Morton  
Randi Nelson-Rogers

Bill Noble  
Blaine Petersen  
Kim Peterson  
Shawn Pike  
Maybelle Press  
Jessilyn Provost  
Irmari Ramos  
Beverly Rasmussen  
Chad Rhinehart  
Randi Rogers  
Louise Rounds  
Tonje Sielatycki  
Scott Slade  
Curtis Smith  
John Sullivan  
Lori Tanguay  
Carrolyn Tinsch  
Oliana Tuia  
Glenn Webb  
Jim Wilson

## **WEST LAKE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of West Lake Junior High School is to foster the emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development of the middle level student.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

We believe in:

- Providing a safe, respectful, learning climate.
- Promoting success for all through accountability.
- Creating small, personalized communities for learning.
- Teaching a core academic program.
- Empowering students, teachers, administrators, staff, and patrons to make key decisions.
- Providing master teacher trainers, administrators, staff, and patrons to make key decisions.
- Improving academics through health and fitness.
- Engaging families in student education.
- Strengthening connections with the community.
- Facilitating transition from lower to upper grades.
- Emphasizing life skills in all classes.
- Reducing class size to enhance the quality of learning.
- Establishing developmentally appropriate, interdisciplinary curricula.
- Enhancing and valuing teacher collaboration time.
- Inspiring respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Andrew Odoardi, Madeleine Choir School, Visiting Team Chairperson

Mary Ann Erdman, West Jordan Middle School, Jordan School District

John McNeil, West Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

Joyce Smart, Logan High School, Logan School District

Barbara Springer, Oquirrh Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

**VISITING TEAM REPORT**  
**WEST LAKE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

West Lake Junior High is one of fifteen junior high schools found in Granite School District. West Lake receives students from four elementary schools within West Valley City. The majority of students live within walking distance of the school. The physical facility is clean, bright, and welcoming. West Lake is a Title I school serving 1,080 students in grades seven, eight, and nine. The school follows a semester system, with seven 45-minute class periods each day. The students of West Lake live in neighborhoods that cover the spectrum of middle-class and lower middle-class socioeconomic status. Many students reside in single-parent and no-biological-parent households, and in areas of high crime and gang activity. Many students are immigrants to the United States. The majority of students are academically below their grade level in reading and math, and most students are also English Language Learners or special education students. The mobility rate for the school is 56 percent over the school year. Fifty-four percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunch.

*a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

Although the West Lake staff acknowledges the challenges presented by student demographics, they do not use these challenges as an excuse for low academic standards. The staff is devoted to going from school improvement to school achievement. The school has applied for and been granted a significant number of large grants as a result of its challenging student demographics. The administrators have used these monies to address many of the areas of need and are implementing programs that address achievement gaps. West Lake should be commended for responding to ESL needs by encouraging and supporting so many of their staff members (42 percent) to obtain ESL certification.

West Lake acknowledges the potential for major discipline issues as a result of the negative environment in which many of the students live. There is evidence of a positive discipline policy that ensures a safe learning environment for the school's students. West Lake is proactive in responding to survey data on perceived safety issues such as bullying, substance abuse, and students exhibiting respect. There is evidence of a systematic process of collecting and managing pertinent data that guides decision making at the school and classroom levels. The school has many systems in place for collecting comprehensive data. AYP data is disaggregated to provide support for ESL and ELL subgroups. Disaggregated data should also be analyzed to support the minority majority, those in the middle group who are often overlooked.

*b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

West Lake exhibits the desire to create a unified location for collected data and to increase its ability to appropriately direct school resources as a result of data analysis. The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to refine this process, and recommends pursuing methods for effectively gathering, interpreting, and distributing information in a timely manner.

The Visiting Team recommends that departments work together to design assessment tools that address needs specific to this school, using school, district, and state testing resources. West Lake should be commended for its efforts to help assist high mobility students' transition from school to school within the district.

**Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Unfortunately, data collection often equates with frequent testing, which eats away at instruction time. West Lake should take special care to protect instruction time. For example, the YPP data required by Granite District for math classes can be both a blessing and a curse. Care should be taken to ensure that data collection does not interfere with quality instruction.
- With the high mobility rate, staff members should always be questioning the validity of their data, asking "What are we measuring, who are we measuring?" West Lake Junior High needs quick turn-around time on data analysis, and the ability to be flexible in instruction in response to new information.
- The Visiting Team suggests that the school use the "No" received in AYP in the three critical areas of special ed. language arts, special ed. mathematics, and ESL language arts as a motivation to discuss additional teaching and learning styles and to involve cross-curricular teaching to support student achievement in these areas.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

*a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The accreditation process is an ongoing process of collaborative self-study. West Lake is beginning an ongoing process. The documents produced demonstrate that the staff is actively looking at the progress that their students are making. Departmental assessments are very detailed and in depth. Discussions with teachers and leaders showed that there is a deep awareness of student needs and progress,

especially the ESL students. However, the evaluation of the other 50 percent of the students needs to be addressed.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The Visiting Team felt that there was a difference between the self-study's identified strengths and the strengths identified in verbal interactions and observations. In conversations with teachers, students, and parents, the Visiting Team found much greater evidence of collaboration than could be found in the document itself. In verbal dialog, the staff is very aware of its strengths and the students' needs. The Visiting Team feels that the document needs to be more reflective of these strengths. The document also itemizes departmental needs but doesn't address these needs in relationship to the entire school community.

### **CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

West Lake Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

1. Lifelong Learning
2. Thinking & Reasoning
3. Effective Communication & Collaboration
4. Responsible Citizenship & Ethics

#### **Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:**

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Nine months prior to meeting with the accreditation Visiting Team, West Lake Junior High conducted a series of meetings to rewrite the school's mission statement and develop DRSLs. While the faculty and staff responded positively to the collaborative process in building a shared vision that focuses on meeting individual student needs, more time must be spent in defining a compelling purpose and direction for the entire school. Significant and impressive programs have been implemented to supplement the Core Curriculum among West Lake's unique population. Continued collaboration, however, will be necessary for the faculty and staff to ascertain the efficacy of regular and special programs through appropriate assessment. Belief statements reflect West Lake's ambitious desire to make a difference in students' lives. Participants must now address their commitment to tying DRSLs to school goals and goals to appropriate assessments. A tremendous

burden rests on individual teachers trying to meet individual needs. West Lake could embrace its vision and significantly reduce the challenge for teachers through more effective and regularly scheduled collaboration. This would result in sharing responsibilities, establishing school goals, and understanding the evolutionary process the school has so enthusiastically begun.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

West Lake Junior High's accreditation process thus far provides only a glimpse of the tremendous service rendered by dedicated teachers in a myriad of programs geared to the achievement and success of the students. While the current mission statement discusses fostering emotional, physical, social, and intellectual development, focus groups may want to adjust the statement to be more specific in establishing the watermark for the school. The statement should lead to the DRSLs and clarify "what you are and what you want to be." There are 15 belief statements that reflect West Lake's obvious commitment to students. The statements sometimes shift the focus from the middle level student to issues that relate to faculty, staff, administration, and patrons, without reflecting the commitment of the administration and staff to the support of student achievement and success.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

West Lake's mission to date is centered on individual student needs, thus eclipsing clear direction and purpose for the entire school. Because of this, West Lake has not yet aligned its mission and beliefs to support the DRSLs. The DRSLs are strong and effective. Students can enjoy daily reinforcement of each. The staff needs only to address the DRSLs on a regular basis. Because of the ongoing programs in the school, students will be eventually be able to see the effect of the accreditation process in their school and home lives.

*DRSL #1 is Life-long Learning.* Since so many opportunities are provided for students to reinforce this DRSL, students are encouraged to understand the link between their impressive school and its service to their future. Camp West Lake, the At-Risk Alternative Education Program, Why Try, Banana Splits, etc., are directly tied to opening students' eyes to the dedication and commitment of their school. *DRSL #2 is Thinking and Reasoning Skills.* Literacy, which embraces higher-order critical thinking, and numeracy, which assists in problem solving can be linked to ongoing classroom experiences. *DRSL #3 is Effective Communication and Collaboration.* One of the great strengths of this school is a commitment to reach students and parents through excellent programs. Collaboration might refer more to faculty, **but** discussion exists to implement more fully peer tutoring, peer mediation, and continued programs that allow students to interact on a positive basis in many settings. *DRSL #4 is Responsible Citizenship and Ethics.* The

students need look no further than their teachers, but they have also been given tremendous programs to reinforce their roles as citizens of integrity and honor.

### **Curriculum Development:**

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

West Lake is committed to the Utah Core Curriculum. The staff works long hours to assist the school's diverse population through differentiated delivery of instruction. The school's challenge lies in establishing clear-cut goals for the students, and then establishing assessment strategies to measure student progress.

- Departments use vertical teaming among grade levels, and actively seek more time for departments to collaborate. Scheduling adequate time will be an important focus for the future.
- Reading and writing in the content areas are under continual internal assessment. Rubrics are being developed, and West Lake is engaged in finding ways to increase collaboration and use.
- Literacy and numeracy are integral to the school's action plan. It is important for West Lake to identify who its content literacy coaches are, what inservice will be given to the faculty for implementation of the program throughout the school, and how literacy will be assessed.
- The staff seeks to review data in order to make effective choices about instruction.
- The staff understands the need to help all teachers feel the importance of making changes without feeling threatened.
- Curriculum mapping is being expanded to include all teachers in all subject areas.
- Teachers will receive instruction in the use of testing data to make appropriate adjustments in the delivery of instruction.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

Individual teachers and teachers within departments have established a friendly, helpful atmosphere for professional growth. However, collaboration with teachers in other departments is limited. Professional development opportunities are received with enthusiasm and energy, yet effective time management for cross-curricular collaboration has not been specified or allotted. The DRSLs are secondary to special programs created for special needs, yet the special needs programs could be easily aligned with DRSLs when the staff gets time to make adjustments. The DRSLs are effective and comprehensive. Using a "backwards design" format, West



Lake Junior High could align the belief statements with the DRSLs, then create a mission statement that reflects the staff's deep concern for student progress and achievement. The DRSLs would be an excellent starting point to celebrate the effective programs already underway.

### **Quality Instructional Design:**

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

During the two-day visit, the following instructional practices were observed: students working in small groups guided by teachers, individual students working at their desks, hands-on activities in several classes (technology, orchestra, physical education, social dance, world geography, special education), class discussions, and students completing worksheets together as a class. The Visiting Team compliments West Lake Junior High faculty members for their high level of concern in striving to meet the needs of their large number of ELL and special education students, but would like to encourage the faculty members to continue to research and expand their use of multiple teaching strategies.

The Visiting Team observed the faculty to be dedicated, hardworking, and committed to the success of all students, as shown by their attendance of professional development trainings and having 42 percent of the faculty ESL endorsed. Also, the additional before and after school programs for academic, emotional, and social support, as well as the Saturday and summer sessions available for students to receive graduation credit, are indicative of the faculty's dedication to the students.

Both the administration and teachers report that they have made a conscientious effort to align the school's curriculum with the core. The faculty should continue this process by coordinating key concepts through vertical and horizontal teaming with other departments. While teachers are very effective with their current technique of teaching, they might want to explore "best practices" (i.e., Socratic seminars, cooperative learning, project-based learning, etc.) which bring a high level of understanding and increase overall student achievement.

It is impressive how well the faculty works together to ensure all students are learning. While teaming is occurring vertically, the Visiting Team recommends that conversations start between grade-level departments regarding curriculum integration, reading, and writing across the curriculum. The school-wide writing rubric would be supportive of this endeavor also.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

The Special Education Department collaborates with the regular education teachers for a successful inclusion program. A teacher or adult aide attends class with the LD or ID students to assist them in the regular education class. There are 550 students who qualify for ELL support—180 students who qualify for levels A or B, and 370 students who qualify at levels C or D. Presently, 42 percent of the faculty has ESL endorsements, while another two percent will receive their endorsements next year.

Camp West Lake, early morning activities, the At-Risk Alternative Education Program, the Why Try program, Vision 2020, the Graduation Achievement Plan, Lean on Me, Friends Group, Girls Only/Boys Only, Banana Splits, healthy lifestyles, tracking, truancy group, the Alternative Learning Center, the Learning Center, services of a school psychologist, Techniques for Success, and Action 3000 are provided for at-risk learners. The faculty has begun the process of using SATs, Iowa Tests, and CRTs to help make instructional decisions. The Visiting Team suggests that the faculty to continue its efforts to meet the needs of special needs students through differentiated instruction.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

There are numerous programs to support academic, emotional, and social needs of the students at West Lake Junior High. They are as follows: Camp West Lake, early morning activities, at-risk alternative education program, Why Try, Vision 2020, Graduation Achievement Plan, Lean on Me, friends group, Girls Only/Boys Only, Banana Splits, healthy lifestyles, tracking, truancy group, Alternative Learning Center, Techniques for Success, and Action 3000.

There was mention of a school-wide behavior program (CIRCLE) in the accreditation study. The Visiting Team witnessed limited applications of CIRCLE. A school-wide behavior program can be extremely effective when supported by the entire faculty.

### **Quality Assessment Systems:**

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

West Lake Junior High used the results from the Stanford Achievement Test from fall of 2003, and then scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in fall of 2004. The Iowa Tests are only administered to the eighth grade. Also, the faculty studied the Criterion Referenced-Test results from 2001-2004. According to the written interpretation of the scores in the accreditation study, almost every score on the CRTs went down from 2002 to 2003. However, the state raised the cut score in the CRT results for the 2003-2004 school year. Consequently, all of the scores across the state went down and the two consecutive years cannot be compared. With that

in mind, West Lake Junior did improve overall and the push on school-wide literacy and numeracy paid off!

To support the ability to measure continuing improvements, the Visiting Team suggests the creation of staff-developed school-wide assessments to help staff focus on school-wide goal #3 in supporting the DRSLs.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

With the emphasis on standardized test scores as indicators of the performance standards, the means of assessment used in the classrooms do reflect that purpose. It is recommended that teachers also include more authentic assessments that show the knowledge and skills that students are learning, and how they are able to apply that knowledge to real-life examples.

The Visiting Team recommends collapsing the Life Skills indicators into the achievement indicators of the DRSLs as a way to facilitate the work in progress. Individualization and differentiation are taking place in some classes and will be strengthened by expanding the conversations among staff, parents, and students regarding who is not learning in the school and why.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

Interviews with students reflected the sense of fairness students felt regarding individual teacher grading practices. There is no school-wide grading policy.

There is ongoing school administrative support and training for access to and use of student performance data. There is a strong desire among the administration and staff to receive and learn to use timely and accurate data in order to better serve the needs of all students. The staff members understand that using data leads them to better instructional decisions.

The assessments used for determining performance standards are the SAT, Iowa Tests, CRTs, and classroom assessments. The Visiting Team would like to suggest that the faculty receive training on the Utah Test Item Pool Server (UTIPS) designed by the Utah State Office of Education. UTIPS allows every teacher in every subject to create a pre/post test from the State Core Curriculum. Some subjects have test questions already written in the format of the CRTs. Questions can be true/false, multiple-choice, short answer, essay, etc. The test can be taken on the computer with the computer scoring the tests, or it can be printed off and passed out in a hard copy. UTIPS allows teachers to have an immediate result regarding the student's understanding of the curriculum being taught. Then the teacher has the opportunity to revisit any misunderstood information.

### **Leadership for School Improvement:**

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

From the Visiting Team's interviews with staff members, it is evident that there is a widespread feeling of support felt from the administration. Comments such as "The principal gets us what we need to do our job" were frequently heard. The administration has created a climate for learning and has minimized distractions.

The school has established a strong and positive learning environment in which teaching and learning are actively supported. There is a culture of high expectations for students and staff. The school maintains a constant and steady focus on student learning. The depth of commitment of the school to improving student learning is clearly evident. Student and staff accomplishments are recognized.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

There seems to be a high degree of ownership in the school. Staff members are honored for their opinions and consequently are involved in the school decision-making process. The administration allows the staff to problem-solve and make recommendations. An active School Community Council exists that is kept well informed of decisions affecting the education of children. While there seems to be a high degree of trust and collaboration, there does not seem to be evidence of data driven-decision making that is research-based.

The Visiting Team recommends that the school use the NSSE rubrics, in addition to the study of "best practices" by all classroom teachers, to provide a common focus and language for continuing improvement efforts.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

The development of a comprehensive assessment system linked to the DRSLs will be one of the school's major tasks as it works to implement the recommendations of the focus groups and the Visiting Team.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

There seems to be a safe school environment for learning. The administration works hard, as mentioned above, to ensure a school climate where learning can take place with as few interruptions as possible.

Parents, students, and staff members repeatedly commended the school's leadership for improving the schools' climate and culture. School-wide policies and operational procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission and are designed to support student learning. The allocation and use of resources are aligned with school goals.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

The DRSLs do not seem to drive decisions that are made in the school at this time. More time needs to be spent on refining and communicating the DRSLs to the entire staff, and they need to drive decisions that are made for school improvement.

The school leadership is committed to putting into place a process for ensuring the allocation and use of resources that are aligned with the school goals or the achievement of the DRSLs. The leadership has fostered a learning community of adults that emulates the school's efforts to establish a learning environment for students in the classroom.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The Visiting Team found that the administration does a commendable job in this area. In a community with such diverse demographics, the school has a difficult task that will require ongoing effort. Evidence exists of an active Community Council with good representation of the various subgroups that are present in the community. It is important to keep these groups consistently involved in the school/community process.

There is strong evidence that the school has created and sustained a learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging. The Visiting Team encourages the staff to continue its efforts to collaborate across departments in order to foster collegiality and provide cross-curricular connections for students.

### **Community Building:**

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

After meeting with department chairs, focus group chairs, and individual staff and faculty members, it is apparent that the school is developing a climate of community that is reflected in working relationships within the school. In a separate meeting with student leaders, it was apparent that they viewed themselves as a valued part of the school improvement process.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The school cites a variety of programs and practices that support student learning beyond the regular program and school day.

### **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

The level of commitment of teachers to ongoing professional development is high. Many teachers devote substantial personal time to professional development.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

It was evident to the Visiting Team that the leadership of the school fully supports the faculty, and the faculty appears to fully support the leadership. There is a strong desire to do what is best for students. The departments report in their study that there is a need to develop a clearer focus on the DRSLs as a means to improve student learning. Additionally, they acknowledge a need to use more data-driven, researched-based information to dictate the school's direction. The staff should consider implementing these ideas into school action planning.

## **CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI**

Most Utah public junior high/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, only by the USOE—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

## CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The action plan is clearly designed as an attempt to address critical school needs as identified by the school profile and collected data. Teachers have expressed the need for adequate time to discuss students' learning needs and to develop and implement best instructional practices as outlined in the action plan.

It is suggested that Goal 3 be restated, as the rationale and action steps for how students will learn the DRSLs don't align with the state goal of "School Climate."

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

West Lake is staffed by incredibly committed individuals who devote countless hours to helping improve the school, and who strive to address the needs of all students. The action plan can be the vehicle by which staff members can guide their actions, using stated timelines and benchmarks to indicate progress.

Although the action plans are stated as school goals, it is not evident that these goals are embraced school-wide; specifically, not all departments address the school's improvement goals within the departmental analyses. The Visiting Team recommends that each department revisit how it can support the school goals within departments.

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?*

The matrix format of the action plan assists in achieving clarity of timelines and responsibilities for reaching goals. The action steps are broken into smaller steps, including ongoing data collection, evaluation, and subsequent actions. The communication plan within each goal is commendable and will help the staff provide support and input as the action plans progress.

The Visiting Team suggests that action plans could be improved by using shorter increments within time frames and clear benchmarks. It is also suggested that, within Goal 3, the responsibility for implementation shift from the leadership team to department chairs so that each content area is fully represented.

## **CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the staff members of West Lake Junior High School on a sincere effort to conduct a candid self-study of their school and to use this process to identify improvement efforts on behalf of the students and parents they serve. The faculty members learned much about themselves in the accreditation process, and see the need for further study to improve the learning environment.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff and administration for their conscious and diligent efforts in creating a positive culture and climate conducive to teaching and learning.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff and administration for continued efforts to identify the needs of students, and for creating a positive community image for West Lake Junior High School. This image includes providing a safe learning environment, holding high expectations for student learning, and having a staff characterized by caring educators willing to do whatever is necessary to help students succeed. Students were observed to be enthusiastic and motivated to participate in the school activities. This is a wonderful school.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration on its support of the staff and willingness to share the leadership of the school with the stakeholders.

### **Recommendations:**

The Visiting Team is in substantial agreement with the myriad recommendations that come out of the departmental and focus group analyses and the goals of the action plans. These are indicative of the high quality of the self-study effort and the integrity of the processes in working to develop the school improvement plans. The Visiting Team's hope is to provide some focus for the school's improvement processes and link them to attainable results by virtue of the following recommendations.

- The Visiting Team recommends that the action plan include a timeline of long- and short-term goals with realistic goals and dates for implementation and completion. The plan ought to be reviewed and revised as needed to reflect the results of continuous data collection and analysis, as well as the focus groups. The action plan should also include a professional development component that would address "best practices," research- and data-driven strategies, curriculum development, etc.
- The Visiting Team recommends that West Lake Junior High continue to seek innovative ways of increasing opportunities for teachers to collaborate, share best



practices, and implement the school's action plans. The school needs to engage the whole staff in collaborative inquiry with regard to the school's DRSLs. This would include working to increase school-wide understanding of the purposes for and criteria used in selecting the DRSLs, and posting the DRSLs as expectations in every classroom

- In acknowledging the degree of progress being made, the work already in progress, and the quality of the recommendations from the focus group reports, the Visiting Team recommends that the faculty collectively study best practices and research in the teaching and assessing of the school's DRSLs, then identify indicators and establish the standards for students' demonstration of the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to develop its self-study document by (1) collecting additional data, then disaggregating and analyzing student data, and (2) aligning the action plans to address the findings resulting from the profile and departmental analyses of how well students are meeting the desired results for student learning.
- The Visiting Team recommends that more focus be directed toward mainstream students and establishing programs where ESL students who are very bright can engage in challenging curricula in their native languages while receiving training in the Learning Center (which is an excellent program).